

SWIFT OCEAN STEAMSHIPS.

FROM TWENTY-FIVE-DAY TRIPS TO SIX-DAY TRIPS.

Records of the Best Time Made on the Atlantic—Efforts to Still Further Increase the Speed of Steamers—New Vessels.

When the little steamship Savannah steered boldly out into the Atlantic in May, 1819, her speed was not so much thought of as the question whether she would ever get over at all. She made the passage from Savannah to Liverpool in twenty-two days, and returned in twenty-five days in the same year. This round voyage solved the experiment of steam ocean navigation, and from that time until to day there have been regular cycles, or periods, in the increase of the speed of steamers, as well as in the particulars of size, comfort, and luxury. It was not, however, until early in the fifties that particular attention was given to the increase of speed. Travellers who had been accustomed to the time of our fast American sailing packets viewed a fifteen- to eighteen-day's trip by steamer as an intolerable one. But this was changed when the hot rivalry between the Collins and Cunard steamship lines began, and the Collins line went to cutting down time at a rate which attracted wide attention. Thirteen and then twelve days passages began to be common. The American line put on the superb steamship Adriatic as the last of a fleet of four, and the Cunarders followed suit with the Persia and others, and between them the time was reduced to inside of eleven days for regular passages. These were all side-wheel steamers, and burning an enormous amount of coal, were unable to carry much freight, so special attention was given to the care of cabin passengers, emigrants still sticking to the sailing vessels. The loss of the Arctic and Pacific, and other misfortunes, in a few years drove the popular Collins line out of existence, but not before the Adriatic had shaved a ten-day passage to 10 days, and the Cunarders to 8 days. From that time out had it all their own way until other nations began to go to the Clyde or built ships with the old nadir wheel steamers had generally given place to screw propellers, the fleet of which have since then gradually increased.

At this time English ship-builders have not been idle, but very progressive and eager to seize and improve upon the American invention of the screw steamer. American inventors have not been idle either, and, in fact, the most important improvements and inventions in iron steamship building have come from us. We have not an American-built steamer in the Atlantic trade. For many years ten days continued to be a good average fast passage, but now the Cunard and freight traffic began to rival and surpass the older lines by regularly cutting down time to 7 days, 6 hours.

The White Star line was conspicuous for several years in this respect, though now, as a longer route is laid down, the Cunarders are faster. The White Star steamer Britannic made six outward trips averaging 7 days 18 hours 26 minutes, the fastest regular passage averaging 6 days 22 hours 56 minutes.

The fastest sailing of the vessels of this line are as follows: Germany, 7:11:37; Britannic, 7:10:53; both made outward passage in 8:42:25, and the Baltic in 8:0:16. The Britannic made six outward passages in 1881 in 8:1:26. The fastest average of five years is 7:10:53. The average of 1881 since 1870 is 8:7:17, the average homeward time being 8:3:22.

At the same time the Inman line steamers were making some quick trips. The City of Richmond made an outward trip in 1875 in 8:0:12:12; the Berlin in 7:14:12; the Chesterfield in 7:14:12; the Columbia in 7:14:12; the same year in 8:1:39. The Berlin made seven passages outward in 1875 averaging 8:10:56. The average of the Richmond for several years is 8:0:12.

The fastest passage ever made by any steamer of the National line was made outwards in 1875 in 8 days 1 hour 13 minutes, and return in 7 days 7 hours 45 minutes, the fastest trip she has yet succeeded in making.

A year later, however, the Alaska of the same company made an outward trip in 8:0:12:12, and the same year in 8:1:39. The Berlin, the Columbia, and the Alaska, the three fastest steamers of the National line, have since 1870 averaged 8:10:56.

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